

# UPDATE

Newsletter of the African Burial Ground & Five Points Archaeological Projects

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## THE GOOD WORKS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

by Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson

Frustration and elation are the constant companions of researchers attempting to locate documents and information on what life was like for Africans and African Americans living in colonial and early New Amsterdam/New York City. The nature of documentary materials on the subject of the African presence in New York, in general is that written accounts and records were kept by non-Africans, i.e. Europeans. These written accounts and documents must therefore, be considered biased and at best, unreliable.

African and African Americans when mentioned at all in historical documents and accounts are usually mentioned as marginal, rarely as central characters in the re-telling of New York history. Africans and African Americans were generally viewed as beasts of burden, an urgently and direly needed labor force in colonial and early New York. They were however, seldom acknowledged or praised for their individual or collective contributions to the life and history of the city.

The achievements and contributions of African American women to New York City life and history is a subject in particular, of great frustration and elation for this researcher. As an African American woman, a search for our female predecessors is of course, a most personal search for self.

While the earliest mention of an African female presence in New Amsterdam, is in 1628, four years after New Amsterdam was established as a Dutch trading city in 1624, by the Dutch West Indies Company, this article will focus on the "good works," of the African American women of 19th century New York City.

As individuals and collectively, African American women have had crucial roles as workers, entrepreneurs, organizers, mothers, educators, and freedom fighters. Many of these seemingly ordinary women who make extraordinary contributions did so — despite the poverty, discrimination, legal and social restrictions imposed on African Americans by the Dutch, British, and early American governments.

The concerns of enslaved and free Africans living in colonial New York City were numerous — but perhaps the most pressing was the national agenda of the attainment of freedom and equality with whites for all enslaved Africans in America.

*continued on page 8*

## THE TIES THAT BIND: A POLITICAL CELEBRATION

by Emilyn Brown

On Friday, November 5th, 1993 Howard University hosted a day long seminar, ancestral tribute and evening reception to commemorate the successful transfer of nearly 400 remains recovered from the African Burial Ground in New York City. The celebratory theme, "The Ties That Bind," also marked the beginning of a new future, forged between New York's African American community and Howard University, one of the most prestigious African American institutions in the nation.

The day's events began on a cultural high note with Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, Urban Anthropologist and Director of the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI) providing an overview of the African presence in early New York. "Africans were the second major group to arrive in New Amsterdam after the Dutch," Dr. Wilson stated as she began to trace the many roles and contributions of African people to the life and history of New York City. But Dr. Wilson also cautioned the audience that the day's celebration in no way implied that the African Burial Ground had become a closed issue. "It's very important that the general public keep vigilant. While we can rest easier, knowing that the remains are now in the hands of the best qualified researchers in the country, being studied under African American leadership, the need for continuous information on the progress and findings of this research cannot be overstated."

"It's not enough," Dr. Wilson continued, "for this information to find its way into academic circles. It's got to be made available to every man, woman and child who wants it. That's the purpose of having a public information office."



We always complain about there being a lack of information which is why it's important that we use the resources available to us and to help expand those resources."

Throughout the day, numerous panelists offered their views on issues impacting the African American community through such topics as Continuity and Change in African Culture and The Meaning of the African Diaspora. On the topic of Rebellion and Repression, Dr. Leslie Rankin-Hill, Assistant Professor at the University of Oklahoma, incorporated previously studied burials of enslaved Africans as part of the theme. As a specialist in physical/medical anthropology, Dr. Rankin-Hill offered comparisons between New York's African Burial Ground and various cemeteries throughout the African diaspora. Her discussion included recovery of human remains found buried in shackles or mass graves in which men, women and children had come to a violent end, all in contrast to the relatively small degree of overt violence so far identified in the African Burial Ground. The example to date is an African woman found with the musket ball lodged in her ribs.

Dr. Rankin-Hill noted how findings of arthritic conditions within African burial populations remain consistent and may relate to labor intensive tasks. Similarly, the highest percentage of deaths among Africans or African Americans appear to be women who died in childbirth or shortly after. The deaths of children were

## *Ties That Bind (cont.)*

primarily identifiable through markings on the teeth caused by fevers and other childhood illness.

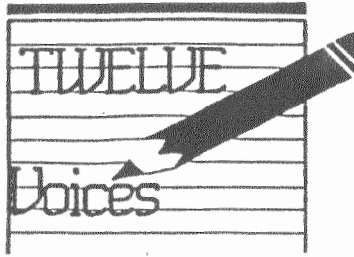
On another topic of concern was offered by Mr. Richard America who made a case for reparations. Author of *The Wealth of Races*, Mr. America based his argument on past labor provided by enslaved and free Africans. Discussing the institution of slavery as the means by which the nation's economy was diverted from one segment to another, the author argued that control of income still remains in those same hands. "As 12% of the population," Mr. America explained, "we should earn 12% of the nation's income versus the 7% we do." That difference, according to the author, breaks down to \$264 billion versus \$159 billion yearly.

Among the many factors attributed to this difference are investments and the practice of hiring unskilled workers at lower wages. At least \$15 million is achieved through labor discriminations alone. Shrugging off assertions by policy makers who contend that reparations have already been paid through social programs, Mr. America countered this position, adding that African Americans were responsible for maintaining their own subsistence for more than 350 years. "To enrich our ancestors unrequited labor," he concluded, "we must make a case for reparations."

Following the symposium, the "official" transfer of the remains took place at Rankin Chapel, and proved to be a simple, yet highly effective gesture. Before a standing room only audience, a royal Kente covered box, containing the last of the transferred remains was handed to Dr. Michael Blakey by Mary Lacey Madison, a community activist chosen to participate for her long involvement with the African cemetery.

Accompanied by prayers offered from a representative group of spiritual leaders including Dr. Clarence Newsome, Dean of the Howard's School of Divinity, Yusef Saleem, Imam of the Washington Masjid, Michael Haney, Chairman of the Reparation Committee, United Indian Nations in Oklahoma, and representatives of the Akan from Ghana, the ceremony began and concluded with libations to the ancestors.

A solemn processional, accompanied by drumming signalled the next phase of the celebration, as participants filled Crampton auditorium to listen to keynote speakers Dr. Michael Blakey, Senator David Paterson, Howard Dodson, Dr. Joyce Ladner and others, review past struggles and future goals concerning the African Burial Ground. Perspectives offered by both New York and Howard University communities emphasized an underlying theme of unity and future self-determination. Additional prayers offered by Okomfo Aba Nsiah Opare, Senior Priestess of the Bosum-Dzemawodzi Shrine in New York, as well as selections performed by the Howard University and St. Augustine gospel choirs, used words and music to convey the essence of what the African Burial Ground's meaning to past and future generations. Afterwards, participants attended a gala reception held at the Blackburn Center Ballroom where impromptu drumming and dancing brought the day's historic events to a close.



Compiled by Cynthia Copeland & Kmar Kashif

*The United States General Services Administration (GSA) has determined that utility service (gas, steam, electricity and telephone) must be installed this winter for its 34-story federal office building at 290 Broadway. This federal office building is within a New York City historic landmark district. The excavated portion of the African Burial Ground at this site on Duane and Elk Streets is now a national historic landmark site. The utilities installation process involves digging trenches, some as deep as twelve-feet, to provide utility services to the building. The unearthing of human remains is possible.*

**Question:** Would you care to express your opinion or concerns regarding this activity?

"I think the disturbance of remains at the African Burial Ground and the continued inability to avoid major damage to the historic site is a tragedy. When will it ever stop? Look at what has already been lost and destroyed — dare I say desecrated — we must put a stop to these invasions."

The Reverend Thomas F. Pike  
Rector, Calvary/St. George's, NYC

"Why can't these utilities companies and other parties involved in the building and construction of their properties come into to the 21st century and demonstrate the array of intelligence that's been developed in this country. There are alternate means for providing utilities — solar and wind energy are excellent choices. We have plenty of natural energy sources within our solar system — why not use them. As for telephone service, if young drug dealers can make a profit selling drugs using wireless cellular phones, why

not use this advanced form of communications technology. NO! DO NOT UNEARTH ANY MORE REMAINS. LET THE SOULS REST!"

Professor Joe Jackson  
African Studies, Lehman College, NYC

"Well, the fact of the matter is that the building is going to get utilities no matter what, and we can't hinder them (utilities companies and the GSA) from installing them. However, what's extremely important and necessary is that an adequate monitoring system be in place, should more remains be discovered and unearthed. And if human remains are unearthed, they should be removed for scientific study, so that in-depth study can be re-written and truthfully told based on the facts. And furthermore, I think they (builders) should make sure that there is some sort of commemorative mural or plaque or remembrance of some kind that recognizes the ancestors and their contributions made to America's history — particularly New York City's history, in the lobby of that building at 290 Broadway.

Ruby Brent Ford  
Concerned Citizen

"...They're always screwing over people of color. They have no respect. You never see them do this to other people. They shouldn't have built the damn tower in the first place; like New York City needs another office tower. Let 'em freeze. They don't need to desecrate those grounds anymore. The only respect we get is disrespect."

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## *Twelve Voices (cont.)*

Yvette Davila, Poet

"It seems to me that the most important struggle is to make sure that those things negotiated for, such as the museum, are funded because that's where the current battle is. The building is going to get utilities and they're not going to spend \$20 million because the community wants them to do it a different way. So, I think we should just roll with the utilities, make sure it's done correctly and focus all our energies on making sure that all other aspects of the project are funded."

Dovell Nelson  
Lab Technician, African Burial Ground

"As long as the project continues the way it is and has the archaeologists out there monitoring the site, I think that we should be okay with how it's being carried out. They're only going an inch at a time when the trenches are being cut, so the potential for damage is minimal. As soon as any intact skeletal remains or recognizable, quantifiable piece of cultural artifact or skeletal material is found they will halt the process. I'm confident because of the team that's going to be out there overseeing the project. I'd be very concerned and nervous if it was just Con Ed out there digging trenches like the did on Chambers Street, where without having an archaeological team assembled and working with them they just blitzed right through eight skeletal remains (including slicing one right in half). I think that we're fortunate and it needs to be done the way we're doing it."

Gary McGowan  
Lab Director, African Burial Ground

"The African Burial excavation is a project of a very sensitive nature because of the people buried there and their history (kidnapped, enslaved, forced labor, inhumanely treated, disrespectfully buried), and thus must be handled differently from other construction projects. For the General Services Administration to now be bringing to the attention of the descendant community utility excavations, is once again following suit with the way this project has been handled. It is my belief that some type of allocation could have been made for utilities during the original ground breaking and planning/construction of the 34-story office tower and that all of this "after the fact" planning should cease or could have been avoided."

Steve Harper  
Public Educator, OPEI

Unfortunately, these latest actions of the GSA are not the slightest bit surprising. It would appear that their method of operation is to simply wait out any opposition to whatever it is they want to do. In the case of the African Burial Ground, the mandate, not just from the people of New York, but from the federal government, seemed to be clear. Specifically, it seemed that the intent of the public law passed by Congress, and signed by the President of the U.S. was to prevent the "further exhumation of skeletal remains from the Negro Burial Ground." In the event that the GSA officials do involve themselves with further exhumations, they would be violating the spirit and intent, if not the actual letter, of the law. In terms of the activities of the concerned scholars and activists who surround the project, it is my feeling that attention should now be focused first and foremost on the immensely important research being

*cont. pg.11*



## African American History Month Events Calendar

### February

Ongoing events: Jazz Retrospective: Remembering the Duke. Call for times. Exhibition of paintings and photos celebrating Duke Ellington and other jazz artists through February 19. Cathedral of St. John The Divine. 1047 Amsterdam Avenue (112th St.) (212) 778-2602

Showcase of African American and Caribbean artists — Emma Amos, Romare Beardon, Elizabeth Catlett, Melvin Edwards and others. Runs through July 3 at The Studio Museum, 144 W. 125th St. (212) 864-4500

Black Dance in Photographs. An exhibition of historical portraits, visual images and text celebrating the contributions of African Americans in the performing arts, through Feb. 28. Harlem School of the Arts. (212) 926-4100

Bad Girls! An exhibit that offers an irreverent view of conventional ideals such as childhood, motherhood, fashion, food, sex and beauty. The Museum of Contemporary Art. 583 Broadway. (212) 219-1355

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture features a major exhibit, African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia. (212) 491-2200

American Museum of Natural History celebrates Black culture through films, workshops, music, dance and plays. (212) 769-5315

**1** Celebrate the birthday of Poet Laureate Langston Hughes at his former home at 20 East 127th Street. Poetry, song, southern cuisine and cocktails are part of the evening's festivities. A \$35 contribution will support future programs and maintenance of the Poet's home. For reservations call (212) 502-0694

OPEI African Burial Ground slide presentation at N.Y. Public Library — Harlem Branch 8:00 p.m.

Opus Dance Theatre Company performs at the Allerton Branch of the New York Public Library, Bronx, N.Y. (718)881-4240

Forum on "Neutralizing Black on black Violence," featuring Senator David A. Paterson and Amos

Wilson, author of Black-on-Black Violence. 175 W. 135th St. bet. Malcolm X and A.C. Powell Blvd. (212) 517-0118. Free.

**3** OPEI African Burial Ground slide presentation at NY Public Library—Mid-Manhattan branch, 6:00 pm

**5** OPEI African Burial Ground slide presentation at N.Y. Public Library—115th St. branch, 2:00 p.m.

**9** The Ethnic Heritage Ensemble performs a blend of African root/jazz fusion, World Financial Ctr., 200 Liberty St., 18th fl. 6:30 p.m. (212) 945-0505

**10** To Be Young, Gifted and Black! The cast of Lorraine Hansberry's memorable play/film recall highlights of the author's literary accomplishments. Federal Hall National Memorial, 26 Wall St. 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 12:35 p.m. and 2:10 p.m. (212)264-8700. Free.

**12** OPEI African Burial Ground slide presentation at the N.Y. Public Library—Countee Cullen Branch, 104 W. 136th St. 2:30 p.m. (212) 491-2070

Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington. A lecture by John Edward Hasse, 1:00 p.m. \$6 Museum of the City of N.Y., Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212) 534-1672 ext. 214

Spirituals, Worksongs, Playsongs and Blues. A musical performance by Bernice Johnson Reagon. 3:30 p.m. \$8. Museum of the City of NY, Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212) 534-1672 ext. 214

**13** Jazz Legacy Ensemble performs at the Schomburg Center, 135th St. & Lenox Ave. \$9 admission. (212) 255-9607, (212) 491-2206

**14** A lecture on Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant Preservation presented by Joan Maynard, president of the Weeksville Preservation Society (718) 756-5250

**17** The Municipal Archives presents an exhibit on the African Burial Ground, 31 Chambers St. Free admission. (212) 788-8607

**19** OPEI slide presentation on the African Burial Ground at NY Public Library — Kingsbridge branch. 2:00 p.m.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. presents "The Harlem Renaissance Remembered." A program of music, dance and story-telling at 3:00 p.m. 118th St. & Amsterdam Ave. Free admission. (212) 874-5300

# African American History Month Events Calendar

## FEBRUARY

**19** African Burial Ground and Historic Commons Walking Tour. \$10 for adults, \$7 for students. Reservations (914) 966-1246

**21** James Baldwin Literature and Music Series presents a Poetry and Jazz Marathon featuring Amiri Baraka, Camille Yarbrough, A. Wanjiku Reynolds, George Edward Tait and Kmar Kashif. Harlem School of the Arts. \$10 Contribution (212) 926-4100

**22** Spiritual Vision: A discussion of philosophical and religious sources as they relate to the challenge of the global crisis of the 21st century, by Hortense Calisher. American Museum of Natural History. Free. (212) 769-5315

**26** Children's Workshop: The Down Home Bantaba, Sule Greg Wilson with Baile and Fotade McKnight at 10:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. \$6 Museum of the City of New York. (212) 534-1672 ext.. 214

Black College Database/Planning workshop for the college bound student, includes self-evaluation, choosing a college and financial aid counseling. Harlem State Ofc. Bldg. 163, W. 125th St. 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Pre registration is necessary. Call Mon.-Fri. 4-8:00 p.m. (718) 493-5722

African Burial Ground and Historic Commons Walking Tour. \$10 for adults, \$7 for students. Reservations (914) 966-1246

Abdou Rahman Mangara, a Gambian Griot and Gambare Player will present a program of music and oral history. N.Y. Public Library, Allerton Branch, 2740 Barnes Ave., Bx., NY (718) 881-4240

**27** Voyage of the Drum. Musical performance by Sule Greg Wilson and Ensemble. 1:00 p.m. \$8 Museum of the City of N.Y. (212) 534-1672 ext., 214

## Media Watch

- o Good Heath for African Americans by Barbara M. Dixon, L.D.N., A must read for those who want to get the most out of life through proper diet and exercise.
- o Portrait of a Racist: The Man Who Killed Medgar Evers (St. Martin's Press, \$23.95) Written by the nephew of accused killer Byron De La Beckwith corroborates the accusation of guilt through a biography that probes the dark side of white supremacy.
- o Malcolm X: Make It Plain. A 2 1/2 hour PBS documentary featuring rare footage of family and friends who provide insightful dialogue into the life and evolution of Malcolm X. Check local listings for time and day.
- o American Playhouse: Fires In The Mirror Anna Deveare-Smith recreates the events surrounding Crown Heights in a tour-de-force monologue.



## *The Good Works of African Women (cont.)*

Two of America's best known African American women were instrumental in aiding themselves and making sacrifices for others in the aim of attaining freedom and equal rights. Isabella Baumfree (1798-1883), better known as Sojourner Truth was a native New Yorker, born in Ulster county in 1798. Isabella Baumfree renounced her slave name in 1849 after living and working in the Five Points Mission House in New York City. One of the mission house's chief goals was to help alcoholic and drug addicted New Yorkers renounce liquor/drugs and accept the will of God. Sojourner worked relentlessly at this task before taking on the greater challenges of becoming a renown advocate for women's rights, and anti-slavery lecturer. The oratory ability, musical skills, and dramatic presence of Sojourner Truth was well noted by African Americans and European descended abolitionists.

Harriet Tubman (1821-1913), born in Dorchester, Maryland ran away from her masters plantation at the age of 25. Tubman is known as the infamous conductor of the Underground Railroad who never lost a passenger, the "Moses," of her people, and Civil War and Union spy. Harriet Tubman is described as a woman who could neither read nor write, but despite this she is credited with bringing more than 300 fugitive slaves from the South across the Canadian border. In 1857 Tubman purchased property in Auburn, New York where she established a family home for herself and her parents. Today, the Harriet Tubman House is a museum dedicated to her life and achievements.

These two courageous women, tireless anti-slavery, and women's rights advocates are the names and faces that most of us with the slightest awareness of African American historical contributions are familiar with.

They constitute the few, the famous, the canon of popular knowledge on the historical contributions of African American women. Without reservation, we give them high praise and acknowledgement.

There were of course other unsung heroines of the colonial period. New York City, like all other urban communities has it's own local heroines of African origin. Catherine Ferguson (1779-1854), the Mother of Old New York is just one of the ordinary women who made extraordinary contributions to her people and this city. Ferguson was born enslaved, in 1779 in route from Virginia to New York City. She and her mother were sold to different masters when she was eight years old, they never saw each other again. Catherine purchased her freedom from her master at age 16, and married Francis Ferguson. Catherine and Francis Ferguson were the parents of two children, whose names we do not know because they did not live to be five years old. This researcher has dubbed Catherine Ferguson the "Mother of Old New York," because between 1812 and 1854 Catherine Ferguson adopted a total of forty-eight orphaned children, twenty-eight European originated children. In 1814 Katy Ferguson started the first Sunday school in New York City, when she was asked to bring her "Sabbath School," to a local Church on Warren St.

Ferguson was multi-skilled and had several occupations while raising many of her adopted children. Between 1812 and 1852 Ferguson worked as a cake baker, confectioner, merino shawl worker, seamstress, silk dyer and pastry cook. In 1854, the year that Ferguson died of cholera, she owned and operated a pastry shop at 74 Thompson Street in Greenwich Village.

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## *The Good Works of African Women (cont.)*

Elizabeth Jennings (1823-1893), a twenty four year old school teacher at Colored School No. 2 in 1853, (formerly known as an African Free School) became the Rosa Parks of New York in 1854, when she refused to ride in a segregated "colored only" bus. Jennings was assaulted and then arrested for this infraction. Local African American leaders became incensed at this treatment and took the Third Avenue Railroad Company to court. The youngest, least experienced lawyer at Broadway based law firm Culver & Parker, Chester A. Arthur was assigned to the case.

The case came to trial before Judge Rockwell in Brooklyn Circuit Court on February 22, 1855. Jim Crow seating on public transportation was challenged and overturned as a result of Jennings's refusal to sit in second class seating. The Brooklyn judge however, did not rule that all African New Yorkers with carfare could ride in equality with whites. Instead the judgement was made that Negroes who were sober, well-behaved and free of disease could ride on public transportation. Elizabeth Jennings was awarded \$225.00 and court costs for damages by the all male, all white jury.

In 1842 Jennings opened the first kindergarten for "colored children," in New York City out of her home on West 40th Street. Elizabeth Jennings was a member of St. Phillips Church on Centre Street, and she is interred in Cypress Hills cemetery in Queens.

As a result of Jennings ruling for several years the Colored People Legal Rights Association, celebrated the anniversary of the ruling which overturned segregated seating on public transportation.

Another local African American heroine and role model was born in Brooklyn in 1847.

Dr. Susan Smith McKinney-Stewart (1847-1918) was the first African American female doctor in New York state. She was also the third African American female physician in the nation. Born in the Weeksville section of Brooklyn, she served as the organist for a number of years for the Bridge Street Church. Dr. Smith McKinney-Stewart graduated from New York Medical College for Women. She did post-graduate work at Long Island Medical College Hospital.

Dr. Smith McKinney-Stewart practiced medicine in Brooklyn from 1870 to 1873, and from 1874 through 1895. She was a founder of The Women's Hospital and Dispensary at Myrtle & Grand Avenues. Today there is a Susan Smith McKinney Stewart Chapter of the Journal of the National Medical Association composed of Black Women's physicians.

Catherine Ferguson, Elizabeth Jennings, Dr. Susan Smith McKinney -Stewart, along with Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and numerous unnamed, unsung African American heroines lived and died having left New York a better place. These women touched hundreds by the lives they lived. It is they of whom I refer to both generally and specifically, when I write of the "good works" of African American women. I call these good works in full understanding that this is the revisionist and reconstructive viewpoint of a researcher, because I doubt that these women saw their acts of courage and kindness as anything more than simple acts of necessity and of survival.

**The next installment of this article will focus on the associates, businesses and organizations formed by African and African Americans in 19th century New York City.**

## NEW YORK BLACK WOMEN'S HISTORY: AN INTRODUCTORY READING LIST

Compiled by Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.d.  
Urban Anthropologist

Brown, Hallie Q. *Homespun Heroines: And Other Women of Distinction*. New York: Oxford University Press (1988)

Busby, Margaret. *Daughters of Africa*, Ballantine Books, New York (1992)

Curry, Leonard P. *The Free Black In Urban America 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream*. University of Illinois Press

Dickerson, Richard "Abstracts of Early Black Manhattanites" Genealogical & Bibliographical Record, #1, #2, #3

Foner, Philip S. ed. *Frederick Douglass On Women's Rights*. Da Capo Press (1992)

Flexner, Eleanor. *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States*. A Harvard Paperback (1959, 1975)

Hymowitz, Carol & Michele Weissman. *A History of Women In America*. A Bantam Book (1976)

Lowenberg, Berth & Ruth Bogin, eds. *Black Women in Nineteenth Century American Life: Their Words, Thoughts, Feelings*. Pennsylvania State University (1976)

Quarles, Benjamin. *Black Abolitionists*. A Da Capo Paperback (1969)

Roff, Sandra "Researching The History of Black in New York State: Resources at the New York Historical Society" *Afro-Americans In New York Life & History* (1985)

Russell, Sandi. *Render Me My Song: African-American Women Writers from Slavery to the Present* New York St. Martin Press (1990)

Sharp, Sandra. *Black Women for Beginners*. Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc. New York, 1993

Shockley, Ann Allen. *Afro-American Women Writers 1746-1933 An Anthology and Critical Guide*, New American Library (1988)

Sterling, Dorothy ed. *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women In The Nineteenth Century*. W.W. Norton & Company (1984)

Yellen, Jean Fagan. "Afro-American Women, 1810-1910: Excerpts From A Working Bibliography" *But Some Of Us Are Brave* edited by Gloria T. Hull & Barbara Smith

\_\_\_\_\_. *Women and Sisters: The Anti-Slavery Feminists In American Culture*. Yale University Press, New Haven



### DID YOU KNOW?

- o Since OPEI's official opening in May 1993, more than 110 slide presentations and 40 lab tours have been presented to more than 5,000 people.
- o The Federal Steering Committee of the African Burial Ground meets the last Monday night of every month at the Schomburg Research Center for Black Culture. 515 Malcolm X Boulevard at 6:00 p.m. These meetings are open to the public. If you need further information call: (212) 788-2897
- o The OPEI is now accepting college interns who will receive college credit for their training and participation. Contact Ms. Tuesday Brooks at (212) 432-5707 for details.
- o OPEI needs volunteers to act as representatives for the African Burial Ground project. Please call Ms. Donna Cole at (212) 432-5707 for details and training dates.

## *Twelve Voices (cont.)*

carried out at Howard University and around the country. In terms of the study of U.S. as well as African American history, this is, in many respects, the most important and illuminating find of the century. Nonetheless, in both popular and academic circles, far too little is known about this find. Therefore, all attention should now be focused towards research and publications of information coming out of Burial Ground."

Kevin Foster, Graduate Student,  
Anthropology  
University of Texas at Austin

"As I understand landmark preservation, once a site has been given landmark status, there are very limited things that can be done to the site. Over and above the landmark issue, Americans hold a "cultural" value precluding the excavation of human remains.

Without minimizing the concerns about unearthing a burial site of national significance, the USGSA has a reasonable need to be considered. I have a hard time imagining that given the current state of technology, both concerns cannot be accommodated. Instead of digging trenches, couldn't services be carried over land? As the building is nearly erected, I must imagine that burial sites were not unearthed at the level of the foundation. Perhaps services could be built that go not deeper than the foundation level. Centralizing services so that more is carried on a single line may be an option that would also minimize risk to the historic site.

I don't understand why a compromise that accommodates all parties involved cannot be reached. I would recommend that the interested parties contract with a private

consultant to conduct environmental impact studies. The consultant should be instructed that the parties want to do whatever is possible to reach a compromise agreement."

D. Perry  
Concerned Citizen

"For centuries, African Americans have been denied basic human rights simply because of the color of their skin. All human beings are entitled to birth and death rights. Even when the child is in the womb, many rally outside for his/her safe passage into this world. Yet, when a black slave died in America, the land s/he slaved for and saved, it seems they are not worthy of their rights even after death. Is this the legacy we wish to continue?

I wonder, if this burial ground were discovered in some other nation or country, would it even be an issue to discuss? It seems as though centuries old practices are once again getting played out through the descendants of all concerned.

If modern technology can make babies outside of the traditional plan, what then is the debate over wires and a building? Is it not possible for these utility companies to utilize some of the skills that their architects and engineers have studied so long to master (no pun intended) and use satellites for wireless communication and solar energy for heating and other purposes.

...it is imperative that we as descendants of slaves implore the descendants of masters to show respect for our ancestors' remains by finding other means to resolve this current dilemma. ...Slavery is a legacy Euro-Americans will never live down, just as Germans still suffer today

cont. pg. 12

for the errors of Hitler, let us not make the same mistakes.

I consider this dilemma with the utility companies a sign of the time arrived. Perhaps we can now build on truths that have the power to free us all as people yet strengthen the ground that is already beneath our feet, without digging it up."

Terry Gibson  
Concerned Citizen

I recognize that since the decision has been made to construct this building, utility installation is inevitable. My charge, therefore, is to Con Edison and the GSA to proceed with this installation sensitively and intelligently. Beyond the possibility that any further uncovered remains might belong to any of our ancestors (even if our ancestry is European or Native American), any bone unearthed also has the potential to contain some archaeological clue that could help piece together years of lost history.

My expectation is that Con Ed (and the GSA), knowing this possibility, and realizing that the contents of the soil are now under city and federal legal protection, would proactively ensure their intentions and care, through written memos, statements by an official who would claim full responsibility in advance for violations or errors, and an invitation of public scrutiny. Those who are watching will expect no less than the highest levels of care. Also, my understanding based on a recent Steering Committee meeting, is that the work needed to procure authority, funds and a site for the proposed museum is outside of GSA's authority. I wonder if the public is aware that a major lobbying campaign is needed, directed toward both the U.S. Congress and toward the city.

Susan Pearce  
Sociology student  
New School for Social Research

"Was there not an alternative area other than within the confines of the African Burial Ground? I feel that the GSA is essentially desecrating a holy area; sacred ground. These are our ancestors not just any piece of land. Is there any other place or area to install the utilities? Furthermore, why did they have to build this building in that area once it was discovered that it was a burial ground? I feel that GSA should just leave the land alone. What would have happened if this burial ground was of European lineage? Why, almost a year later, are they revealing the need to install utilities now. I find it hard to believe the GSA just realized the need for telephones and other utilities."

Allen Cole  
Concerned Citizen

*Coming In The Spring Issue....*

- o The Good Works of African American Women (part II)

- o Laboratory Reports from:

Foley Square - 6 World Trade Center  
Howard University - Washington, D.C.

## ***The Hopper Home: A Continuing Cause***

You may have passed the row of brownstones along Second Avenue near 10th Street in the East Village section of Manhattan without realizing that at least one of these unassuming structures is part of a historic connection to various causes, including abolition, help for the poor and a successful crusade for prison reform.

Referred to as the Hopper Home, building No. 110 Second Avenue honors the memory of Issac T. Hopper, a Quaker who became a pivotal figure in New York's political and social causes more than a century ago. Born in Woodbury, New Jersey in 1771, Issac was a tailor by trade, but his inclination toward benevolent causes had gained him a reputation by the age of thirty. Known to resort to controversial methods when loopholes in the fugitive laws could not be found, Hopper became a high ranking officer in the Underground Railroad. During the many years he lived in Philadelphia, his house was a famous way station from which an estimated 1,000 African American men, women and children made their way to freedom.

As overseer of the poor and Inspector of public prisons while in Philadelphia, Hopper's family often found itself in debt. As a result, he was disowned more than once by the Quakers although reinstated once his debts were cleared.

One of the most formidable challenges Hopper faced was the Quaker Society's ambivalence toward slavery. The Society was already abandoning its anti-slavery stance despite the efforts of some members

to maintain the initial fervor. Unwilling to compromise their values, Hopper and other Friends of the Society met in the city and formed the "New York Association of Friends, for the Relief of those held in Slavery, and the Improvement of the Free People of Colour." They considered it the only way to further the cause without breaching Society rules that frowned upon outside fraternity. In addition to whatever help he provided through the N.Y. Association, Hopper's bookstore on Pearl Street was a depot for anti-slavery literature while his self-published tracts "Tales of the Oppressed" detailed the on-going brutality of enslavement.

But opposition to slavery was equally matched by pro-slavery factors and public sentiment had hardened against abolitionists by 1830. Within the Society and the New York merchant community, a clash of ideals versus the profitability of slavery, led to the Society's disowning Hopper for the third and final time. "Many Friends [Quakers]," Hopper wrote in May of 1843 during his trial, "were largely engaged in dealing in the produce of slave labour and by this craft have their wealth... when we ask the dealers [Friends] in human flesh to manumit their slaves, [they say] we ought to pay them for their property, for the slaveholders thing they have as good a right to their slaves as they have to their horses and oxen..." Many Quakers had apparently also established businesses in the South.

Hopper continued to counsel and make



## *The Hopper Home (cont.)*

arrangements for African Americans who managed to escape their captors. Relying on friends such as David Ruggles, a free African American who was an officer in the Underground Railroad as well as a bookstore owner and publisher. The assistance he provided to an enslaved African American named Thomas Hughes, who managed to escape from his owner John P. Darq while visiting New York resulted in sensational headlines and became the catalyst for his dismissal from the society. "The Society of Friends may have disowned me," Hopper wrote at the conclusion of his trial, but I have not disowned the Society." He continued to attend services despite his status.

The issue of prison reform for female inmates also vied for Hopper's energies. He began his alliance with the New York Prison Association shortly after his trial, and along with his daughter, Abby Hopper Gibbons, founded an early home for women as part within the New York Prison Association in January of 1845. Along with like-minded citizens, they were able to provide honest work for former female inmates, many of whom were recovering alcoholics, through domestic or factory work, education and spiritual uplift. During the next eight years, over 900 ex-offenders were helped by the struggling organization. In 1853, a literary campaign carried out by Carline Kirkland, who published "The Helping Hand for Discharged Female Convicts," appealed for money for a new and larger home. That appeal was answered through a handsome bequest honoring Issac's past deeds and the home became established at 110 Second Avenue where he, and many others, redoubled their efforts to provide a helping hand to female inmates.

Today, operating under the banner of the Women's Prison Association and Hopper Home,

the building continues to serve as a halfway house for African American and Latino mothers recently released from prison. Available services include foster care prevention, counseling, housing placement assistance and alternatives to incarceration for ex-offenders. Despite the passage of time, the creative energies and ideals of the home are best summed up by the words of its founder who believed that "when we run with a desire to do good, we shall run well; for the very desire...springs from the source of good. —E.B.

\*Suggested reading: Narrative of the Proceedings of the Monthly Meeting of New York. Self-published N.Y.:1843

Bacon, Margaret Hope  
Lamb's Warrior: The Life of Issac T. Hopper. N.Y.: 1970

Child, Lydia Marie  
Issac T. Hopper: A True Life N.Y.:1853

\*New York Historical Society

